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Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
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Agenda item 5
Half-day discussion on the Arctic

Recommendations of the Permanent Forum on the Arctic

1. The Arctic is an enormous area, sprawling over one sixth of the Earth's landmass, spanning more than 30 million square kilometres and 24 time zones. The region has a population of about 4 million people and is home to over 30 different indigenous peoples who speak dozens of languages. The Arctic is a region of vast natural resources, with a very clean environment compared with most areas of the world.

2. The indigenous peoples of the Arctic depend upon their lands, territories and natural resources, including marine resources, for their material and cultural survival. To survive as distinct peoples, indigenous peoples of the Arctic must be able to own, use, conserve and manage their lands, territories and resources. Although, there has been progress in some of the Arctic countries and at the regional level, as far as recognition of indigenous land rights, territories and resource are concerned, there are still many unresolved matters that require urgent attention.

3. Climate change and environmental degradation related to natural resource extraction, such as mining and forestry, constitute great threats to the traditional lifestyles and cultures of indigenous peoples of the Arctic. Climate change has an impact on all aspects of life in the Arctic region, from traditional subsistence activities, including hunting, fishing, reindeer husbandry, farming, gathering and food sovereignty, to community health. The melting permafrost, flooding and storm surges progressively destroy village sanitation, drinking water and other infrastructure in many Arctic communities.

4. As climate change reduces sea ice in the Arctic region, the Arctic seabed is increasingly the subject of competing State claims focused on securing control over resources, estimated to include 25 per cent of the world's undiscovered oil and gas reserves. Increased economic activity in the Arctic is likely to result in further environmental degradation as a result of oil, gas and mineral extractive processes. The resultant increased traffic and pollution, along with the influx of new people, will have an impact on the lives of the indigenous peoples of the region.

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5. Indigenous peoples in the Arctic region also face a broad range of challenges regarding economic and social development, human rights, education, health and culture. For example, in relation to development and health, life expectancy is shorter and infant mortality rates are higher among indigenous Arctic residents in Alaska, the United States of America, northern Canada and Greenland when compared with those of non-indigenous residents of Arctic countries. Similarly, indigenous residents of Alaska, northern Canada and Greenland have higher mortality rates from injury and suicide as well as higher hospitalization rates for infants with pneumonia, tuberculosis, meningitis and other respiratory infections.

6. The Permanent Forum notes that the Greenland-Danish Self-Government Commission submitted its report on self-government on 6 May 2008. The main task of the Commission has been to submit draft legislation regarding a self-government arrangement for Greenland. A referendum was held in Greenland on 25 November 2008 concerning the act and the process leading up to its entry into force. The Permanent Forum welcomes the successful passage of the act through the Danish Parliament on 19 May 2009.

7. The Permanent Forum acknowledges the close and growing cooperation among the Arctic States and the indigenous peoples in the Arctic.

8. The Permanent Forum International Polar Year initiative to undertake a reindeer herders vulnerability network study will focus on understanding the adaptive capacity of reindeer pastoralism to climate variability and change. The study, which has been endorsed by the Arctic Council, is being managed by a former chairman of the Permanent Forum, Professor Ole Henrik Magga.

9. The Permanent Forum confirms that the rule of law is a prerequisite for peaceful regional development and recalls that an extensive legal framework applies to the Arctic Ocean, including, notably, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. This framework provides a foundation for responsible management of this ocean.

10. The Permanent Forum recalls the relevant United Nations resolutions concerning national institutions for the protection and promotion of human rights, including the annex to General Assembly resolution 48/134 (the "Paris Principles"), recognizing the significant role that institutions at the national level can play in promoting and protecting all human rights and fundamental freedoms and in developing and enhancing public awareness of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

11. In this connection, the Permanent Forum welcomes the initiative of the Government of Norway to establish the Gáldu Resource Centre for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The resource centre will distribute information about human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples, in conformity with the spirit of the Paris Principles regarding national institutions for the promotion and protection of the rights of indigenous peoples. The Centre is an independent body, governed by its own board, which includes indigenous peoples.

12. The Permanent Forum urges all Arctic States to endorse and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

13. The Permanent Forum urges the Nordic States to ratify, as soon as possible, the Nordic Saami Convention, which could set an example for other indigenous peoples whose traditional territories are divided by international borders.

14. The Permanent Forum urges States to financially resource, empower and support local Arctic indigenous communities in order to give indigenous youth and women, together with other members of the communities, the opportunity to secure and develop their cultures.

15. The Permanent Forum calls upon the Arctic Council to provide the indigenous permanent participants in the Council with adequate financial resources, enabling them to effectively participate in all relevant activities of the Council.

16. The Permanent Forum calls upon the Arctic States to provide financial resources to indigenous peoples of the Arctic for the purpose of building a partnership to enable them to adapt to climate change.

17. The Permanent Forum recommends that the Arctic Council formally engage with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to jointly follow up the international expert meeting on scientific, social, cultural and education challenges of climate change in the Arctic (3-6 March 2009 in Monaco).

18. The Permanent Forum calls upon Member States to analyse the compatibility of domestic laws with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, in particular with a view to harmonize laws dealing with Arctic renewable resources upon which indigenous peoples depend, and to include the indigenous peoples of the Arctic in a direct and meaningful way in this analysis.

19. The Permanent Forum recognizes the harm that the recent decision of the European Parliament regarding the seal product import ban may cause Inuit in the Arctic, and calls upon the European Union to rescind this import ban and, failing that, to enter into direct and meaningful dialogue with the Inuit Circumpolar Council to discuss ways of moving forward. Furthermore, the European Union must make decisions that affect both European and non-European indigenous peoples, taking into account their right to free, prior and informed consent.

20. The Permanent Forum welcomes the document of the Commission of the European Communities (COM (2008)), Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: The European Union and the Arctic Region, delivered in Brussels on 20 November 2008 and urges the European Union to begin implementing the recommendations relevant to indigenous peoples from this document.

21. The Permanent Forum decides to appoint Mr. Lars Anders-Baer, a member of the Permanent Forum, as a special rapporteur to undertake a study to determine the impact of climate change adaptation and mitigation measures on reindeer herding.

22. The Permanent Forum decides to appoint Mr. Carsten Smith and Mr. Michael Dodson, members of the Permanent Forum, as special rapporteurs to undertake a study about indigenous fishing rights in the seas.

23. The Permanent Forum welcomes the following message from the Indigenous Peoples' Global Summit on Climate Change, held in Anchorage, Alaska, from 20 to 24 April 2009, contained in the Anchorage Declaration: "We offer to share with

humanity our Traditional Knowledge, innovations and practices relevant to climate change, provided our fundamental rights as intergenerational guardians of this knowledge are fully recognized and respected. We reiterate the urgent need for collective action".

24. The Permanent Forum calls on the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to conduct a fast track assessment of short-term drivers of climate change, specifically black carbon, with a view to initiating negotiation of an international agreement to reduce emissions of black carbon.

25. The Permanent Forum notes that the Governments of Finland and Sweden have been repeatedly called upon by different United Nations treaty bodies to clarify and recognize recognized Sámi rights to land, fishing, hunting and reindeer grazing. The Permanent Forum notes that in Norway the Sámi Parliament has not given its free, prior and informed consent to the draft Mineral Act.

26. The Permanent Forum urges the Governments of Finland and Sweden to recognize Sámi rights to land, fishing, hunting and reindeer grazing in compliance with the Convention No. 169 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.